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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Vladimir Putin of the
Russian Federation (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin
James A. Baker III

Notetakers: David M. Zimov, Jenna Galyean,
Jeff Blair, Craig Wieschhorster

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko

DATE, TIME December 10, 2003, 12:38 - 12:50 p.m., EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Vladimir, good day. How are you, sir? (U)

President Putin: Good, George. How are you? (U)

The President: First, congratulations. I noticed that you had
a mighty victory in the Duma. You are a lot better politician
then you let on. (S)

President Putin: I am trying, George. (S)

The President: You are doing more than trying, you are
succeeding. Anyway, it was a great victory. (S)

President Putin: Thank you very much, George. (S)

The President: Listen, very briefly, I am calling to ask you to
meet a very close friend of mine for a tete-a-tete, to have a
one-on-one meeting to discuss Iraq, to discuss the debt,
contracting and other issues, and that would be Mr. James Baker.
I would ask if you would be so kind as to meet him. As you
know, I am very close to James Baker, and I would ask that you
make time and that you see him alone. (S)

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(President Putin: Thank you very much, George. Thank you for your call and for your congratulations on the election results from the Duma. Indeed, our position there has been strengthened. As a matter of fact, the pro-presidential circle has been preserved and even a bit strengthened. I am somewhat concerned about the so-called democratic forces in the Duma. They have not been able to be elected and they have pursued a so-called pro-West line. This gives me pause and some room for concern. As a matter of fact, the result with respect to the right-wing is that they have been victims of their own mistakes. In past elections, they narrowly managed to overcome the 5 percent barrier, and they crawled there with small resources. (C)

The President: Yes, yes. (U)

(President Putin: And further, they have a lot of personal ambitions, so they could not get united. I will tell you that one reason, the main reason, is they took a very opened, or very overt opportunity for cooperation with the West. In particular, I can say they tried to do their utmost in that direction. This undercut their position, and my position, too, in a way. On the other hand, this is a situation in which we will be able to structure a real multi-party system not only with competition between the parties, but as a real system to assess. (S)

The President: Yes. I see. (S)

President Putin: That would be composed of the left-center. You would call them the democratic center. Then there is the center-top providing a reorganization and reform, and the right-wing center, what you would call a radical-right, perhaps. I am very happy that Mr. Medvedev, our new head of Presidential Administration, and Condoleezza, have established relations already and will be meeting very soon. This is an encouraging fact. We want to hear more of what you have to say on the U.S. experience, and we want to establish a multi-party system. (S)

The President: Thank you, Vladimir. That's good news. (S)

(President Putin: As far as your request for James Baker, I will be pleased to see him and to have a one-on-one meeting with him. I have known him for some time, from when I was still in St. Petersburg. I met him there on a short trip. (S)

(The President: Listen, that's very kind. He is standing right here, and I would like for him to have a quick word with you. Before I hand over the phone to him, I wanted to wish you and Ludmila and the girls a Merry Christmas. I think you will find this conversation worthwhile. It will be an important one. (S)

President Putin: Thank you. You know, George, this is something that gives me great pleasure. You see, when I hear your voice it gladdens my heart to hear the vigor and force and persistence that I feel in what you say and how you say it. I am happy to see that you are in good shape. Have a Merry Christmas. (S)

The President: Thank you, Vladimir, and here is Jim Baker for a short word. (U)

Secretary Baker: Hello, Mr. President. How are you, sir? (U)

President Putin: I am happy to hear your voice, Mr. Secretary. Secretary of State, I believe this is the proper way to address you, given all of your great contributions to international affairs. I look forward to seeing you in Moscow. (S)

(Secretary Baker: Thank you very much, and I will look forward to that myself, hopefully next week. (S)

President Putin: Very good, agreed. (U)

Secretary Baker: Thank you, sir. Good-bye. (U)

President Putin: Thank you. Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --